



# Connecticut State Building Trades Council

**KEITH R. BROTHERS**  
President

**JOSEPH P. TONER**  
Executive Director

Testimony of  
Joseph Toner, Executive Director  
CT State Building Trades Council

Labor and Public Employees Committee  
February 7, 2023

Senator Kushner, Representative Sanchez, Senator Sampson, Representative Ackert and distinguished members of the Labor and Public Employees Committee, my name is Joseph Toner, and I am the Executive Director of the CT State Building Trades Council. We represent approximately 30,000 construction workers across the state. I am proud to submit testimony in strong support of SB 983 An Act Concerning Unemployment Insurance for Striking Workers.

The National Labor Relations Act (NLRA), passed during the Great Depression in 1935, guaranteed the right of most private sector employees to organize unions, bargain collectively with their employers and go on strike to resolve a labor dispute. As a result, the management/employee relationship was strengthened, workplace conditions became safer and economic growth ensued. However, throughout the years employers have developed work arounds to the protections provided by the NLRA and have steadily prioritized profits over the well-being of their employees. Today, far too many workers are subjected to low wages, unaffordable health care, insufficient retirement benefits, poor working conditions and unfair labor practices. The weakening of the NLRA and lack of adequate funding to the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) has fostered the growing wealth disparities between CEOs and the workers they employ.

The collective bargaining process provides employers and employees with the opportunity to negotiate their wages, benefits and working conditions. Sometimes, however, agreements are not reached after months, and sometimes years, of negotiations. In such cases, a strike may be the only option left for the workers in order to resolve their differences with their employer. This decision is a last resort and a difficult one to make. Striking workers risk a loss of income and the permanent loss of their jobs.

Currently, Connecticut law prohibits striking workers from collecting unemployment benefits because it is presumed that they left their jobs voluntarily. Workers, however, may qualify for

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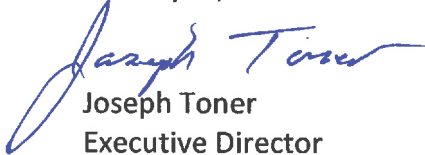
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UI benefits during a labor dispute, with no waiting period, if (1) the labor dispute is a lockout or (2) the claimant is not participating in the labor dispute that caused the unemployment and does not belong to a trade, class, or organization of workers who were employed at the premises immediately before the dispute started.

SB 938 would make striking workers eligible to collect unemployment benefits after they have been on strike for two consecutive weeks. New York and New Jersey already allow striking workers to collect unemployment benefits. New York reduced its waiting period from 7 weeks to 2 weeks in 2020. New Jersey has a 30-day waiting period but is considering legislation to reduce it to 2 weeks in order to mirror New York's law.

SB 938 is designed to help deter work stoppages and to encourage good faith bargaining. When striking workers can access unemployment benefits to help sustain themselves and their families, it empowers them to advocate for protections that benefit all workers. I urge the committee to support this bill.

Thank you,



Joseph Toner  
Executive Director

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